

Sermon Outline.

SUCCESS ASSURED TO A DARING FAITH.

THE DOUBLE TEST. JUDGES VI, 33; VII, 8.

INTRODUCTION.

1. The Midianites and their allies had left the land for a season. The grain is now ripening. Once more the seventh and last time, they cross the Jordan and camp in the Valley of Jezreel to repeat their annual practice of stripping the land of its sustenance. But how changed: The Israelites did not, as was their custom, flee into the mountains and hide themselves in the caves and dens; they seem bold and daring.

2. The change explained. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon" Gideon. His will is disposed and irrevocably determined by the Divine energy, and his courage and enthusiasm has spread. His spirit is caught up by his kinsmen. At the blast of his trumpet they have rallied to his standard. They are once more hopeful.

3. This hope has spread. Messengers with the story of Gideon's personality and of his victory over Baal upon their tongues, have filled the neighboring tribes with hope and courage. They too have gathered to Gideon's standard. He now has an army of 32,000 men. Instead of meeting now and then a straggling Israelite hastening to some hiding place, Midian meets an army. The tables have turned.

I. Gideon's test of God—"Wilt thou save Israel by my hand"?

1. Gideon's caution again shows itself. He has gained a signal victory. At the blast of his trumpet an army is at his feet. Success, beyond his hopes, has thus far crowned all his efforts. "Shall I go on?" "If so, will Jehovah be with me?" Are now the queries of Gideon's mind. Off to God, in prayer with his troubles. He prays God to let him subject him to tests by which he may be assured of the Divine support, and God graciously grants his petition.

2. The two fold test.

(a) The first test. Palestine is subject to cool nights and heavy dews. He had doubtless noticed the tendency of dew to collect and the place which

he used to protect himself from the night's cold, and this suggests the test "If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast spoken, behold, I will put a piece of wool on the threshing-floor; if there be dew on the place only, and it be dry upon all the ground, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by my hand as thou hast spoken." The test was successful, for when Gideon arose the next morning he wringed a bowlful of water out of the fleece.

(b.) The second test.

To make the matter doubly sure Gideon humbly beseeches God to let him reverse the test the next night. "Let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon the ground let there be dew." And it was so. Gideon is now assured. He never asks another sign. God is always ready to help a real, though weak faith, but he has no signs for a curious or caviling spirit.

II. God's test of Gideon.

Wilt thou save "by might" or "by power" or "by my spirit?"

1. The situation.

Israel's army is encamped on the mountain slopes that bound the Plain of Esdraelon Southward; Midian and his allied forces are encamped on the north side of the plain at the foot of Moreh. Israel's foe with all her numbers, wealth, and power, was in full view. A situation exactly suited for the application of the Divine tests.

2. The double sifting.

(a.) The people are too many for God's purposes. He not only wants to save Israel from her enemies but from a much worse calamity—the sins of idolatry. It is a religious war; a war, not so much between Israel and Midian as between Jehovah and Baal. They are in danger of adding to the worship of self. Hence their number must be so reduced that the Divine hand will be clearly discerned in their deliverance. Having the army in full view of the enemy, so that their mettle may be tried, God tells Gideon to apply an old law. Deut. xx: 1-8. After the priest has tried to encourage them, Gideon gives permission to certain classes, and especially to the fearful to depart from the scene of conflict. Fear is contagious. It is better to

have the panic before the battle than during it; for then it may sweep away the whole army, as it was 22,000 left. They came with good promise, but the sight of such an innumerable host fills them with trembling. Such men cannot be depended upon in the heat of battle.

(b.) There is a spring at the base of these hills where they are encamped, which empties out into a clear pool below where many can drink at once, and that in full view of the enemy. This suggests the second test. The men are still too many. Another sifting is necessary to get only choice men. Many men are not prudent and cautious, many think too much of their own comfort and will not deny themselves. These men are thirsty. So Gideon is commanded to bring them down to the pool and try them there. Some will be on their guard and willing to curb their appetite. They will be content to take a little water in their hand and drink it with their eyes on the enemy. Others will be careless and thoughtless, so they will throw themselves down on the banks of the pool and drink their fill. 300 "lapped, putting their hand to their mouth;" and 8,700, "all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water." The Lord commanded Gideon to take the 300, promising to save Israel by them. Here is another proof that when God chooses men they are choice men, and that they are chosen because they are choice men. With such a leader and such a band relying upon Jehovah we may look for a great victory.

III Practical Conclusions.

1. What our churches need is not quantity but quality, not more but better men and women. God's people have always been tempted to trust in numbers rather than in him. These outward things we can see, but it is hard for some of us to see Him.

2. To which of these three classes—the 22,000, the 10,000 or the 300—do you, do I, belong? Don't be too ready to condemn the 22,000. How often have you made great promises that you have not fulfilled. It is easy to be brave when the battle is afar off. Peter was ready to die with